



So a Comedian, a Producer and a Journalist All Board a Train in NYC...

Every year Rob Corddry and Jonathan Stern of Adult Swim's Emmy-winning *Childrens Hospital* have turned a cross-country Amtrak ride into a writers room on rails, replete with jokes only 'reprehensible douchebags' could make **By Rob Tannenbaum**

B EING A BALD, somewhat recognizable comedian isn't as glamorous as you think it is. Rob Corddry is on his way to the Amtrak dining car when a group of young women notice him. Sort of.

They can't quite place Corddry. "You're in *Hot Tub Toy Machine*, right?" one asks.

"Yes! I'm the black guy from *Hot Tub Time Machine*!" he responds.

As Corddry chats genially with them, one woman eyes his companion, Jonathan Stern. His beard is partially gray; his rumpled shorts are completely gray. "You look like a producer type," she says sagely. Stern nods.

It's May 2015, and Corddry, 44, and Stern, 48, are riding the Lake Shore Limited from New York to Chicago, then continuing via train west to L.A., working en route on the seventh season of *Childrens Hospital*, their madcap Adult Swim comedy series that returned Jan. 22. It's an annual tradition: Corddry (the show's creator, co-producer and star) and Stern (a writer and producer) create a mobile writers room each spring,

usually with writer-director-producer David Wain, who bailed on the train (and thus this story) this year.

Corddry is most somewhat recognizable from *Hot Tub Time Machine*, or his time as a *Daily Show* correspondent, but increasingly, people kind of recognize him from *Childrens Hospital*, an absurd, fictional medical TV farce, which has scored Emmy nominations in four straight years and won twice.

The cohort of people who recognize him "has expanded beyond just stoned 18-year-olds," he says.

Not that there's anything wrong with stoned 18-year-olds. "No. Please, they pay my mortgage."

As a waiter brings steaks and tiny bottles of chardonnay to our table, Corddry and Stern reminisce about how they met — while making *The Ten*, a 2007 comedy co-written by Wain and Ken Marino, a *Childrens Hospital* star.

"I remember at screenings of *The Ten*, people walked out of the theater at the same juncture," recalls Corddry.

Stern: "Was it when you ass-rape Ken Marino?"

Corddry: "Yep." Aaaaaand scene.

CORDDRY'S COMEDY MIXES SMUT and satire with a pinch of surrealism, which explains his popularity among stoned 18-year-olds. It's even evident in movies, where he's invariably cast as an oblivious buffoon. A reviewer for the website Christian Answers rated *What Happens in Vegas* "very offensive" and *Hot Tub Time Machine* "extremely offensive," which explains why the latter was funnier than the former.

Childrens Hospital is, literally, stupidly funny. It's simultaneously about a group of sexy, sex-hungry, sex-having doctors who ignore their young patients and the actors who play these doctors. The show has absurd plot twists, poop humor, constant continuity breaks and lots of double identities. Corddry, for instance, plays Blake Downs, an inept doctor in frightening clown face paint, and also plays Cutter Spindell, the actor who plays Blake Downs, as well as Cutter's twin, Rory Spindell, who plays Blake after Cutter dies in an on-set mishap. The writers pack mayhem and vagina jokes into 11-minute episodes like, well, clowns in a tiny car.

Stern is concerned that I think that every joke about sex organs and effluvia in *Childrens Hospital* comes from Corddry. "I pitch something almost every day that

involves sperm going all over the place," he boasts.

As our train passes West Point, going north along the Hudson River, Stern opens from Google Drive a spreadsheet that details the status of all 14 episodes in the show's seventh season ("Owen Hits Puberty," "Sy Gets Tenure"). Corddry and Stern have several scripts to read, write and edit on this trip. But half of any good writing session is B.S., digressions and wisecracks. At least half.

They're revising the second draft of an episode titled "DOY Convention," in which Blake falls through the roof at a Doctor of the Year convention and accidentally wins the award because he scares the head of the convention out of his chronic hiccups. But no one's sure what Blake has done that's so frightening.

Stern asks: "What are some things you're afraid of?"

"I'm afraid of bears," replies Corddry. "I'm afraid of pressurization."

"Pressurization?"

"Pressurized canisters. I never tapped the keg in college. There's a lot of pounds per square inch inside a keg. I didn't want to f— with it."

Stern rolls his eyes at these humdrum, geyish phobias. "What are you afraid of?" asks Corddry.



Childrens Hospital co-creator Stern has been an EP since the show first aired in 2008.



"Getting older," says Stern. "My kids not loving me."

Corddry finds a list of phobias online and reads them aloud: fear of garlic. Fear of infinity. ("That's awesome!") Fear of money, colors, female genitalia, nosebleeds. "Judeophobia — what do you think that's a fear of?" Corddry chuckles.

Stern: "What if it's something modest, like broccoli? Blake falls through the ceiling holding broccoli."

Corddry closes his laptop. "We've already thought too much about it."

THE TRAIN IS WESTBOUND, nearing Schenectady, N.Y. Stern checks the A.V. Club website for its review of a new episode, "Sperm Bank Heist," which features a contortionist with a unique skill. "She didn't like the contortionist sucking his own dick," he says. "It cracks me up. It cracks all of us up, so whatever."

Childrens started as a five-minute web series under the auspices of Warner Bros. before Adult Swim — Cartoon Network's nighttime, adult program block — put it on cable. When reporters began paying attention, Corddry explained that Blake's clown makeup was modeled on John Wayne Gacy, who worked as a clown and murdered at least 33 people.

"It wasn't an homage to Gacy," he says, "just a way to subconsciously inspire revulsion. After the second season or so, someone at Warner Bros. said, 'Can you stop referencing Gacy in interviews?'"

"The clown makeup makes Blake creepy and other, you know? Because I'm *so* handsome and accessible," he continues. "Actually, I enjoy wearing the makeup because it covers up these bags around my eyes."

The show's writers, producers, and main cast (Malin Akerman, Lake Bell, Erinn Hayes, Rob Huebel, Marino, Henry Winkler and an almost unrecognizable Megan Mullally) often realign in other projects, including Adult Swim's *NTSF:SD:SUV*, *Mr. Neighbor's House* and *Newsreaders*, a *Childrens Hospital* spinoff. No one's getting rich from the show, and castmembers often are unavailable because of better-paying gigs. But *Childrens* permits them a freedom they don't find elsewhere. "Sometimes you wait your whole career for an experience where you love going to work," says Stern.

Adds Corddry, "It's like summer camp."

Although the writers seem to get away with anything they want, they do have to contend with a Standards & Practices department. Once, the network stopped Corddry from showing the World Trade Center towers on fire. That, he concedes, was not a good idea.

COMEDY IS FULL OF RAGING MAN-children characters who don't realize they're morons: most Judd Apatow movies, many Will Ferrell movies, every Adam Sandler movie. But Corddry adds a tincture of menace and by-legal-definition insanity. Where you'd expect a character to hesitate — in *Harold & Kumar Escape From Guantanamo Bay*, say, where he plays a racist Homeland Security official who literally wipes his ass with the Bill of Rights — Corddry hits the throttle. His eyes bulge, his baby-round face glows with enthusiasm.

As a *Daily Show* correspondent from 2002 to 2006, he broke the

story that voting-booth handles were covered in fecal bacteria and in interviews never shied away from asking tough questions, including "How much, right now, to take a dump in your sink?"

It's an odd turn for a guy who once earned his living in a Shakespeare company. Corddry was born in small-town Massachusetts and attended UMass, where he was a "quintessential frat guy" until his love of theater interfered with kegstands. He went to New York, managed a restaurant, did "a ton of cocaine," started doing comedy at Upright Citizens Brigade theater and, after Amy Poehler and Rob Riggle left UCB for comedy stardom, followed in their wake to *The Daily Show*. Later, he quit that secure job and moved to L.A. to star

"I'm well aware that people think I'm an idiot," says Corddry, whose roles include (from top) a clown-faced doctor in *Childrens Hospital*, a racist bureaucrat in *Harold & Kumar Escape From Guantanamo Bay* and a middle-aged drunk in *Hot Tub Time Machine*.



in *The Winner*, a Fox sitcom that ran for only three weeks. Broke and fearful, he came up with the idea for *Childrens Hospital* while sitting with his daughter in an L.A. children's hospital and witnessing a medical emergency (she's fine now).

"I'm well aware that people think I'm an idiot. That's fine," he says.

IT'S MORNING, AND OUR TRAIN HAS passed Elkhart, Ind., near Chicago. Corddry took a sleeping pill last night, woke up early and wrote notes to the first draft of a script.

"I was pretty driven by id until I got married. I liked to have fun, but I was a worrier, even about sex. I wanted a lot of it, and it always came with guilt. Any time I got to any base with a woman, when I was a teenager, I'd apologize. And she'd be like, 'What are you talking about?'"

He's been with his wife, Sandra, for 14 years. "I'm madly in love. I'm not kidding." They have two daughters, 8 and 6. "We're not gonna have another kid. I cut the sperm tubes."

It's not the crazy-bachelor part of his life that lets him play idiots but the stable-married-man part. "I'm a nice guy, and that comes across, whether onscreen or in person. So I can get away with playing reprehensible douchebags."

We reach Chicago, nearly two hours late. Stern and Corddry prep their rollers and backpacks; their layover in Chicago will be followed by a 43-hour train ride to L.A. They both have a lot of items left on their *Childrens Hospital* to-do lists, not to mention some pressing errands. "I have to get train supplies," announces Corddry. "And I need to buy underwear. I did not plan well for this trip." **THR**